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Eugene Public Library: Celebrating 100 Years!

by Connie J. Bennett
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The Eugene Public Library became a legal entity on November 14, 1904, when a board of directors was appointed by Mayor G. R. Chrisman and approved by the Common Council of Eugene at their regular meeting. The advocacy of women of the Fortnightly Club of Eugene helped establish the new public library and their original volunteer library of 657 books became the nucleus of the book collection. In August 1906, Eugene's Carnegie Library, the first in Oregon, opened

its doors to the city's 6,000 citizens. The first Library Director, Adelaide Lilly, was a member of the women's cultural Fortnightly Club which secured the grant to found a public library. The Fortnightly Club still meets and continues its support today.

In 1959, a sleek new building was built to house an expanded Eugene Public Library (EPL) to meet the needs of a population of 58,500 under the guidance of director Clara Nasholm.

As the local population continued to



grow, library supporters, including the newly-founded Friends of EPL and the EPL Foundation, spent years of dedicated activism to expand public library services. In 2000, the Bethel and Sheldon branches opened. In 2003, the much-awaited new Downtown Library, three times the size of its predecessor, held its grand opening. In just the first year following the opening, library visits increased over 60 percent and circulation went up 23 percent. By 2005, the number of cardholders has increased

40 percent, and 5,000 people visit the library each day.

EPL has been a beloved resource and community center for a hundred years, and looks forward with enthusiasm to another hundred! 🌿

Connie J. Bennett has been Library Services Director of Eugene Public Library for the past 3-1/2 of its first hundred years. She is a past OLA President and was honored as 2001 OLA Librarian of the Year.

